

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
August 13 - 21, 2013

1. [U.S. Urges Investigation of Alleged Syrian Chemical Attack](#) (08-21-2013)
2. [U.S. Deplores Ongoing Violence in Egypt](#) (08-19-2013)
3. [Hagel, Chang Seek to Bolster Military-to-Military Relations](#) (08-19-2013)
4. [Iraq, U.S. Discuss Cooperation against Regional Extremism](#) (08-16-2013)
5. [State Dept. Facts on U.S.-Iraqi Strategic Framework Agreement](#) (08-15-2013)
6. [Obama Cancels Military Exercise with Egypt in Wake of Violence](#) (08-15-2013)
7. [Afghans Lead the Fight in Afghanistan, General Says](#) (08-14-2013)

1. [U.S. Urges Investigation of Alleged Syrian Chemical Attack](#) (08-21-2013)

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration expressed deep concern over reports that hundreds of Syrian civilians were killed near Damascus in an attack that included the use of chemical weapons and requested that a United Nations team in Syria be allowed immediate and unfettered access to investigate the reports.

In an August 21 statement, White House principal deputy press secretary Josh Earnest said the United States strongly condemns “any and all use” of chemical weapons, and that those responsible for their use must be held accountable.

“If the Syrian government has nothing to hide and is truly committed to an impartial and credible investigation of chemical weapons use in Syria, it will facilitate the U.N. team’s immediate and unfettered access to this site,” Earnest said.

For the U.N. team’s efforts to have credibility, the team “must have immediate access to witnesses and affected individuals, and have the ability to examine and collect physical evidence without any interference or manipulation from the Syrian government,” he said.

The Obama administration has also called for urgent consultations in the U.N. Security Council to discuss allegations of the attack and to call for Bashar al-Assad’s regime to provide the U.N.

investigative team with immediate access. Earnest added that all Syrian parties need to provide the team with access to any site of importance to its investigation and to ensure team members security.

In remarks to reporters August 21, Earnest said there is a broad international view that the use of chemical weapons is “completely unacceptable” and the situation “is and should be a top priority of the United Nations.”

The Assad regime has previously claimed it is interested in “a credible investigation that gets to the bottom of reports that chemical weapons have been used” in Syria, he said. “It’s time for the Assad regime to live up to their rhetoric in this regard,” he added.

Earnest said those responsible for any use of chemical weapons would be held accountable, and those responsible for safeguarding chemical weapons would be held accountable for the way in which those weapons are handled.

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said August 21 that after months of working to get the U.N. investigative team into Syria, its presence in the country offers of opportunity to immediately investigate the allegations of chemical weapons use.

If Syrian officials “have nothing to hide, they should be providing the team with unfettered access,” she said and urged international support for the U.N. team.

“There should be no country that stands by or accepts the credible use or the potential credible use of chemical weapons, and every country should be supporting the effort by the U.N. investigative team to go in and look at as many cases as they can possibly look at. And we believe there’s a moral imperative to allow that to happen,” Psaki said.

Related Articles:

[White House on Allegations of Chemical Weapons Use in Syria](#)
[Dempsey Gets Viewpoints from Partners on Syria](#)

2. U.S. Deplores Ongoing Violence in Egypt (08-19-2013)

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration has condemned the continuing violence in Egypt, including attacks on security forces in the Sinai peninsula and Christian institutions, and the deaths of Muslim Brotherhood prisoners held in detention.

Speaking to reporters August 19, State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said there have been many instances of violence stemming from the political conflict between Egypt’s interim government and supporters of deposed President Mohamed Morsy. She urged all sides to refrain from further bloodshed.

“There is absolutely no place for such violence in Egypt. We call on all Egypt’s leaders and the international community to condemn such attacks without equivocation,” Psaki said.

Psaki condemned an attack earlier in the day on a convoy in the Sinai peninsula that reportedly killed 24 Egyptian policemen.

She also said the United States deplores “the reprehensible attacks against over 40 Coptic Christian churches and other Christian institutions, including schools, social service societies and businesses, by extremists bent on sowing interreligious strife when the vast majority of Egyptians reject such behavior.”

Psaki said U.S. officials are also “deeply troubled by the suspicious deaths of Muslim Brotherhood prisoners and a purported prison escape attempt near Cairo.”

She said U.S. assistance to the Egyptian government has been under review since Morsy’s July 3 ouster by Egyptian security forces and subsequent attacks on his supporters, saying that “when hundreds of civilians are killed, it’s not business as usual.”

White House spokesman Josh Earnest told reporters August 19 that senior U.S. officials have remained in contact with Egypt’s interim government and made it clear that they need to “follow through on their promise to transition back to a democratically elected civilian government in Egypt,” as well as to respect basic human rights.

“That includes ... the right to peaceful protest, and it means the end of politically motivated detentions” and ending the recently imposed state of emergency, Earnest said.

He said the review of U.S. assistance is “ongoing.”

“There certainly are consequences for the actions that are taken by the interim government,” Earnest said, noting the recent cancellation of a U.S.-Egyptian military exercise and the delayed delivery of F-16 fighter jets to the country.

Earnest said U.S. officials are evaluating U.S. assistance based upon U.S. national security interests and U.S. legal obligations under the annual Foreign Operations Appropriations Act.

Along with military cooperation, ties between the United States and the Egyptian government include U.S. economic support, assistance through the International Monetary Fund and tourism, which plays a significant role in Egypt’s economy.

“This is a multifaceted relationship that we have with Egypt; we certainly value that relationship. I think that it’s fair to say that the Egyptian government does as well,” Earnest said.

Spokeswoman Psaki said the Obama administration’s review of assistance does not include Egyptian nongovernmental entities and programs designed to promote free and fair elections, health assistance, the environment, democracy, the rule of law and good governance.

Related Articles:

[Hagel: Only Egyptians Can Sort Out Their Country’s Issues](#)

[Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel’s Statement on U.S.-Egypt Defense Relationship](#)

[Hagel Issues Statement on Call to Egyptian Defense Minister](#)

[Bright Star Stoppage Signals U.S. Objection to Violence in Egypt](#)

[Obama Condemns Violence in Egypt, Cancels Bright Star Exercise](#)

3. Hagel, Chang Seek to Bolster Military-to-Military Relations (08-19-2013)

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Aug. 19, 2013 – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Chinese Minister of National Defense Gen. Chang Wanquan today announced that their countries will take a series of steps to improve military-to-military relations.

Speaking to reporters at a Pentagon news conference, both leaders said that close U.S.-China relations will provide stability and security for the Asia-Pacific region and the world.

Establishing better military-to-military relations between the United States and China is important to the overall bilateral relationship, Hagel said.

“The United States welcomes and supports the rise of a prosperous and responsible China that helps solve regional and global problems,” the secretary said. The secretary announced he has accepted Chang’s invitation to visit China next year, a move that highlights contacts between the two nations at the highest military levels.

Contacts between service members will build trust, both Hagel and Chang said. The two men led delegations discussing the way forward and agreed to a number of steps.

The United States has invited the Chinese to attend next year’s Rim of the Pacific multilateral naval exercise, Hagel said.

Also, Chang and Hagel agreed to expand the current system of defense exchanges and joint exercises. Some examples include Chinese midshipmen joining a multinational exchange program at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., and the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement Working Group meeting in Hawaii today to discuss humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

“And this weekend, our navies will conduct another counter-piracy exercise in the Gulf of Aden, building on the first-ever joint counter-piracy exercise we held last year,” Hagel said.

Hagel and Chang also agreed to set up an exchange mechanism between the People’s Liberation Army’s strategic planning department and the Joint Staff’s strategic, plans and policy directorate.

“We also agreed to take use of mechanisms, such as defense consultative talks, military maritime consultative agreements, to actively explore a notification mechanism for major military activities and continue to study the rules of behavior on military air and maritime activities,” Chang said through an interpreter.

The two men also discussed the recently established U.S.-China cyber working group and steps to strengthen it.

Hagel said he and Chang also discussed regional security issues, including North Korea, the East China Sea and the South China Sea.

Chang emphasized a number of times that it is his mission to build “a new model of major country relationship” between China and the U.S. based on mutual respect and win-win cooperation.

“At present, the China-U.S. relationship is in a new historical era,” he said. “Building a new model of China-U.S. military relationship can help us to increase strategic trust to reduce strategic risks and to maintain world peace and regional stability.”

Biographies:
[Chuck Hagel](#)

Related Articles:
[Hagel, Chinese Defense Minister to Meet at Pentagon](#)
[Obama, Xi Discuss Military-to-Military Relations, Cybersecurity](#)

4. Iraq, U.S. Discuss Cooperation against Regional Extremism (08-16-2013)

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration is committed to working with Iraq to address the challenges it faces from the conflict in neighboring Syria and violent extremism that threatens its own internal stability, Secretary of State John Kerry says.

Speaking with Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari August 15 in Washington, Kerry said Iraq “sits at the intersection of regional currents of increasingly turbulent, violent, and unpredictable actions,” and faces threats from both Sunni and Shiite extremists trying to recruit young Iraqis to support Iran and Hezbollah, on the one side, and al-Qaida on the other.

“We are committed to helping Iraq to withstand these pressures and to bolster the moderate forces throughout the region,” he said.

At the same time, “we welcome the steps that have been taken by the Iraqis to build a strong, democratic, and inclusive state,” he said.

Zebari said new and more frequent attacks by al-Qaida have taken many Iraqi lives.

“But despite all these attacks, the Iraqi people have not succumbed, in fact, to these atrocities, and I’m here to inform you and the administration that Iraq ... is not crashing, and it’s not heading to civil or sectarian war,” he said.

“We’ve come here to seek your help and support and security cooperation with the Iraqi government, and, in fact, in counterterrorism and to have the capacity building for our security forces to stand up to face to this increasing threat from the nexus of al-Qaida and Al-Nusrah Front, as a spillover coming over from Syria, let’s say, into Iraq,” Zebari said.

A senior U.S. official who asked not to be identified told reporters August 15 that the United States plans to sell Iraq a \$2.6 billion integrated air defense system for its security forces that will include radar, missiles, guidance systems, training and support. In addition, Iraq will receive a shipment of F-16 fighter jets and training for its pilots, along with continued intelligence and information sharing.

The U.S. goal is to help Iraq have the information to map the network of extremist groups like al-Qaida, “to get at its financing, and to be very precise in its targeting,” the official said.

Along with security support, the Obama administration is working with Iraq and its neighbors to improve economic prospects in the country, which can help provide future opportunities for the country's young people and make them less vulnerable to extremism.

The official said Kerry and Zebari discussed Iraq's overall regional integration "as it grows and increases its oil export and production export potential." Also discussed were ways for Iraq to settle its financial liabilities from the era of former dictator Saddam Hussein in a way that "protects its assets so it can use it for its very dire infrastructure needs," the official added.

The International Energy Agency has estimated that Iraq is on track to produce 6 million to 10 million barrels of oil per day over the next 10 years if it makes infrastructure improvements.

The U.S. official said Iraq and Jordan have had serious discussions on building a pipeline that would stretch from Basra, Iraq, to Aqaba, Jordan. Iraq also is seeking a new oil export pipeline linking the country's northern Kirkuk fields to Turkey, the official said.

"These are long-term projects that we try to work with the Iraqis on and with the regional neighbors on, on using strategic infrastructure to change these very difficult geostrategic realities. And we have some experience in this," the official said.

"If Iraq does develop its overall strategic export infrastructure and its energy resources, it'll harness itself and align mutual interests with a number of different states in the region," the official said.

The United States is also encouraging Iraq to hold regular elections, and is looking ahead to national elections in the first quarter of 2014.

"That'll be a really pivotal moment for the overall future trajectory of Iraq. We want to make sure those elections happen, they happen on time and that they are independently monitored and lead to a genuine and credible result," the official said.

In his discussions, Kerry told Zebari that the Iraqi government needs to address the political and economic problems that are alienating Iraq's Sunni minority, including by passing stalled economic legislation on sharing oil revenues.

"If the Sunni population in Iraq feels totally discontented, then there's an environment for extremists to take advantage," the official said.

Overall, the U.S. approach is "about giving a new generation a better chance, and a better chance to actually live in the global economy and be a part of it," the official said.

"When you see foreign elements coming in and recruiting young Iraqis to go fight in a foreign war and becoming cannon fodder, it is something that is not only heartbreaking to the Iraqis but also to us. And so we want to try to help them to get after this problem," including providing more economic and educational opportunities, the official said.

Related articles:

[Statement of U.S.-Iraq Joint Coordination Committee Meeting](#) (08-15-2013)

[State Dept. Briefing on U.S.-Iraq Strategic Framework Pact Issues](#) (08-15-2013)

5. State Dept. Facts on U.S.-Iraqi Strategic Framework Agreement (08-15-2013)

U.S.-Iraqi Strategic Framework Agreement: Update on Implementation

Since Vice President Biden traveled to Iraq in November 2011 and convened a meeting of the U.S.-Iraq Higher Coordinating Committee, the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) has served as the backbone of our relationship with the Government of Iraq (GOI). The United States and the GOI value the SFA, as evidenced by public statements by each side, the three Higher Coordinating Committee meetings and 24 Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) meetings held in the areas of cooperation outlined in the SFA, the Working Groups within each JCC that meet on a regular basis, and the myriad of developments across these sectors, a sampling of which is listed below:

Defense and Security (Last JCC in December 2012)

- In June 2013, the U.S. Central Command hosted the first U.S.- Iraq Joint Military Committee (JMC), which is a subordinate discussion to the Defense and Security JCC. The JMC addressed issues such as border security, Iraqi military strategy, and engagement of Iraqi Security Forces in regional training exercises. The next JCC likely will be held in Washington this year.
- At the December 2012 JCC, Acting Defense Minister al-Dlimi signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Security Cooperation with the U.S. Department of Defense. This agreement represents the strong military to military relationship between the United States and Iraq, and provides mechanisms for increased defense cooperation in areas including defense planning, counterterrorism cooperation, and combined exercises.
- With strong U.S. support, Iraq has brought its military engagement with regional partners to historically high levels, including military exercises, strategic conferences and bilateral military engagements. Iraq's participation in a naval exercise in Bahrain this year marked the first out-of-area deployment by an Iraqi naval unit in the post-Saddam era and the first-ever Iraqi port visit to Bahrain.
- In close collaboration with U.S. officials, the Government of Iraq has purchased more than \$14 billion in equipment, services, and training through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program for its military and security forces. The Iraq FMS program is one of the largest in the world and is an important symbol of the long-term security partnership envisioned by both countries. We remain committed to meeting Iraqi equipment needs as quickly as possible.

Education, Science and Cultural (Last JCC December 2012)

- The number of Iraqi students studying in the United States increased by 31% from 2011 to 2012 to a total of over 800. Our close bilateral cooperation in this area should produce continued increases in 2013.
- The Baghdad-based English Language Institute, established in partnership with the Iraqi government, is expected to open in October 2013. The U.S. provided \$1 million in funding to support English language instruction to hundreds of Iraqi government scholarship students each year for this program.

- More than 1,200 Iraqis ages 15-22 participated in the Iraqi Young Leaders Exchange Program, including more than 200 in 2013. Areas of focus include leadership development, respect for diversity, and civic participation.
- 150 Iraqi professionals participated in the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) in 2013. Themes include women in leadership, science and technology, interfaith dialogue, energy policy, higher education, journalism, civic engagement, elections, public health, entrepreneurship, stock exchange, and environmental protection.
- The USG, in conjunction with the UN, IAEA, and Ministry of Science and Technology, held a two-day Nuclear Dismantlement Conference in Erbil in 2013, focusing on the Adaya nuclear burial site in Ninewa province. The conference represented the culmination of the DOS Iraq Nuclear Dismantlement Program's seven years of work to safeguard and remediate the most contaminated Saddam-era nuclear sites around the country.
- Cultural heritage is a significant pillar of the Strategic Framework Agreement, reflecting the high value both our nations place on this irreplaceable resource. Through the Iraq Cultural Heritage Project, a \$12.9 million initiative developed and funded by the State Department, and implemented by the nonprofit International Relief and Development from 2008 to 2011, Iraqis have undergone training on cultural preservation techniques (including exchanges with the Smithsonian Institution, the Winterthur Museum and other key partners), rehabilitated and furnished eleven of the museum's public galleries, a three-story collections storage facility, and significantly upgraded conservation labs.

Energy (Last JCC April 2012)

- Iraq's Ministry of Electricity received U.S. training for over 100 of its key engineers and managers on energy security and safety in 2012 and 2013.
- Iraq's Ministry of Oil received U.S. training for 9 key geoscientists and engineers on resource evaluation.
- The Governments of the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq reaffirmed their commitment, including signing a Memorandum of Understanding in January 2013, to jointly cooperate in the areas of oil production and export, natural gas, electricity, and critical energy infrastructure protection.

Law Enforcement and Judicial/Human Rights (Last JCC June 2013)

- After considerable technical support and assistance from the U.S. Government, Iraq has now begun arresting, investigating, and prosecuting cases under its comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation.
- In May 2013 Embassy Baghdad, a Federal Judge from the 2nd Circuit, and the FBI, trained 13 Iraqi investigative judges on techniques in asset recovery in financial crimes, and a presentation on such techniques will be made to the Acting head of the Higher Judicial Council Judge Hammari.
- In 2012, Iraq established the High Commission for Human Rights to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Political and Diplomatic (Last JCC August 2013)

- With U.S. support, Iraq and Kuwait worked together to end Iraq's Chapter VII obligations regarding the mandate of the High Level Coordinator for Missing Persons and Archives and establish a UN-led mechanism to continue and maintain their cooperation in this area. U.S. support also facilitated both parties' successful efforts to resolve the longstanding dispute over damage inflicted on Kuwait's national airline during the Gulf War. As a result, flights between Baghdad and Kuwait City resumed in 2013 after a 22-year cessation. In addition, both sides completed maintenance of the border pillars along their shared border in accordance with UNSCR 833. Iraq has also constructively engaged its key neighbors like Jordan and the United Arab Emirates on issues of shared concern, including the growing conflict in Syria.
- In April and June 2013, Iraq took another step toward building its democratic foundation through successfully holding provincial elections and in preparation for national elections in the spring of 2014.
- The United States continues to strongly support Iraqi civil society and the many NGOs that continue to operate in Iraq under very challenging circumstances, through training and advocacy, bringing public attention to issues of inclusive citizenship, displacement, human rights and women's rights. The State Department also named the Hammurabi Human Rights Organization the winner of its 2012 Human Rights Defenders Award, for its "fearless advocacy for human rights, concrete achievements in protecting female detainees, and critical work on curriculum reform to promote religious freedom."
- Through its UN partners, the United States has contributed over \$1 billion in overall humanitarian aid since the Syria crisis began, including fully funding a \$1 million food voucher program for the Domiz refugee camp in northern Iraq and supporting Syrian refugees living in camps and in host communities in Iraq.
- The United States also continues to provide support to displaced Iraqis, both inside Iraq and elsewhere in the region. Thus far in Fiscal Year 2013, the U.S. has provided over \$87 million to address the needs of displaced Iraqis through the provision of shelter, health care, livelihoods assistance, and other basic humanitarian assistance.

Services, Technology, Environment & Transportation (Last JCC Nov 2012)

- Iraqi Airways continued to revitalize its aircraft fleet, and in part due to U.S. Government advocacy, agreed to a contract with Boeing for 41 planes worth \$5.4 billion for delivery from 2013 – 2017.
- The Department of Transportation's attaché office in Baghdad worked with Iraq's Ministry of Transportation to bring Iraq's airports into compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization codes and regulations, clearing American commercial carriers to resume operations to airports in northern Iraq for the first time in decades.

Trade & Finance (Last JCC March 2013)

- Prime Minister Maliki joined over 100,000 Iraqi visitors to the U.S. sponsored Pavilion at the Baghdad International Trade Fair in the fall of 2012. U.S. organizations' participation was up 80% over the 2011 fair, the first time the U.S. participated since the 1980s.

- The Trade & Investment Framework Agreement between the Governments of Iraq and the United States, which addresses trade issues and improves bilateral economic relations, entered into force in May 2013.
 - In part due to U.S. Government advocacy, major U.S. companies like Boeing, Cisco, ExxonMobil, Ford Motors, Halliburton, Honeywell, and Lockheed Martin all have offices or are represented in Iraq. U.S. exports to Iraq, excluding aircraft, rose 13 percent between the first quarter of 2012 and first quarter of 2013.
-

6. Obama Cancels Military Exercise with Egypt in Wake of Violence (08-15-2013)

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama says the United States is cancelling its biennial joint military exercise with Egypt, scheduled for September, in response to violence in the country between Egyptian security forces and the Muslim Brotherhood.

“While we want to sustain our relationship with Egypt, our traditional cooperation cannot continue as usual when civilians are being killed in the streets and rights are being rolled back,” Obama said August 15 in Chilmark, Massachusetts.

The president’s remarks came the day after hundreds were killed. He condemned the violence as well as the interim government’s decision to reinstitute emergency law.

Obama said the cycle of violence and escalation on both sides is feeding the country’s cycle of polarization and “needs to stop,” and that along with lifting the state of emergency, a national reconciliation process giving all parties a voice in Egypt’s future should begin.

“We call on the Egyptian authorities to respect the universal rights of the people. We call on those who are protesting to do so peacefully and condemn the attacks that we’ve seen by protesters, including on churches,” he said, adding that the rights of women and the country’s religious minorities should be respected.

“Commitments must be kept to pursue transparent reforms to the constitution and democratic elections of a parliament and a president. And pursuing that path will help Egypt meet the democratic aspirations of its people while attracting the investment, tourism and international support that can help it deliver opportunities to its citizens,” he said.

The United States wants to partner with the Egyptian people in their pursuit of a better future, but it is up to Egyptians themselves to determine what that future will be, he said.

“We appreciate the complexity of the situation. While Mohamed Morsy was elected president in a democratic election, his government was not inclusive and did not respect the views of all Egyptians,” he said.

But at the same time, “we don’t take sides with any particular party or political figure,” Obama said.

"I know it's tempting inside of Egypt to blame the United States or the West or some other outside actor for what's gone wrong. We've been blamed by supporters of Morsy; we've been blamed by the other side as if we are supporters of Morsy. That kind of approach will do nothing to help Egyptians achieve the future that they deserve," he said.

The United States wants to see Egyptians work together to succeed as a peaceful, democratic and prosperous country, and the president acknowledged that it will be difficult at times.

"There are going to be false starts. There will be difficult days. America's democratic journey took us through some mighty struggles to perfect our union. From Asia to the Americas, we know that democratic transitions are measured not in months or even years, but sometimes in generations," Obama said.

Related Articles:

[U.S. Deplores Egyptian Violence and Return to Emergency Law](#) (08-14-2013)

[Bright Star Stoppage Signals U.S. Objection to Violence in Egypt](#) (08-15-2013)

Related Links:

[President Obama on Situation in Egypt](#) (08-15-2013)

[Kerry at Diplomatic Committee Meeting With Iraqi FM Zebari](#) (08-15-2013)

[Secretary Kerry on Egypt](#) (08-14-2013)

7. Afghans Lead the Fight in Afghanistan, General Says (08-14-2013)

By Claudette Roulo

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Aug. 14, 2013 – Afghan security forces are in the lead and continue to grow in capacity and capability in the fight against insurgents, the commander of the International Security Assistance Force's Regional Command-East said today.

Army Maj. Gen. James C. McConville also told Pentagon reporters via satellite that even with the progress made by Afghanistan's security forces they are likely to need U.S. support beyond 2014.

Afghan forces are winning, he said, but aren't yet dominating the enemy in a way that takes away their will to fight. It will also take time before the Afghan air force is at full capacity, the general said.

However, when the Afghan air force reaches full capacity, he said, the enemies of Afghanistan "are not going to be willing to continue the conflict."

Meanwhile, ISAF's draw down is progressing, McConville said. Since March, he noted, the number of coalition bases has declined from 58 to 17.

"We have moved into an advise-and-assist role," said McConville, who's also the commander of the 101st Airborne Division. "Afghan security forces are in the lead and they are doing most of the fighting."

Two Afghan army corps -- the 201st and the 202nd -- operate in Regional Command-East. Those units, McConville said, are currently conducting integrated operations involving ground troops with indirect-fire and air support.

"In fact, the 201st just did the largest air assault in recent Afghan history with six Mi-17s and two Mi-35 helicopters," he said.

As Afghan forces have taken a higher-profile role in securing Afghanistan, the enemy is facing a propaganda problem, the general said.

"They used to be able to say that they were fighting foreign occupiers," he said, "and they can no longer really say that anymore because they're fighting Afghan security forces and they're fighting against the Afghan people."

There are only about two months left in the fighting season in Afghanistan, McConville said. And, with winter approaching and the holy month of Ramadan over, the general said he expects the enemy to come out fighting.

"We're expecting a spike in violence," he said. "We expect the enemies of the Afghan people to come out and try to achieve those objectives that they've not been able to achieve."

Now is a critical time, McConville said.

"This is the first time that the Afghan security forces have been in the lead during the entire fighting season," he said. "And they believe they're winning and I tend to agree with them."

Biographies:

[Army Maj. Gen. James C. McConville](#)

Related Sites:

[NATO International Security Assistance Force](#)

[Department of Defense Press Briefing with Maj. Gen. McConville from the Pentagon Briefing Room](#)
